

Rocky Mountain News

Toy wonder

Kids, teachers, parents test the best in play

Ahmad Terry © News

**By Janet Simons, Rocky Mountain News
November 13, 2006**

Elvis Daboni, left, and Ochang Sillman couldn't leave the Magtastik Wonder Coaster alone during the fifth annual Rocky Mountain News Preschool Toy Test, held at Mile High United Way's Warren Village. Using expert feedback from teachers, children and parents, we selected one top toy as well as runners-up in three categories



Aiden Ross, 4, springs higher with each bounce on the Jump Start Trampoline, his smile saying that he has no plans to quit until the ceiling stops him. Across the room, Nicole Montoya,

5, and Jessicka Franklin and Imanni Thomas, both 3, crowd around the Disney Princess Cinderella Vanity Table, peering into the magic mirror as they swap jewelry and try on glittery dresses from the Disney Princess 23-piece Dress-Up Trunk.

Welcome to the fifth annual *Rocky Mountain News* Preschool Toy Test, held at Mile High United Way's Warren Village, which offers low-income single parents a chance to get their feet back on the ground with subsidized housing and child care.

Up to 10 adults crowd a space the size of an average living room, including representatives from eToys (eToys.com) and Shop at Home (Shopathome.com). The Denver-area e-tailers donated about 40 items, including some of the hottest toys of the 2006 holiday season, along with some tried-and-true favorites.

Then the Warren Village Learning Center teachers brought in about 40 3-, 4- and 5-year-olds. The *Rocky* and television partner CBS 4 News took out their cameras and notebooks, and everyone stepped back to see what would happen.

We observed carefully to see what drew the most attention, then asked the children, teachers and parents which toys they favored.

A few days later, after the Play-Doh had become permanently embedded in the colorful alphabet carpeting, we checked back with the Warren Village staff to see how the original choices had held up.

"The trampoline is just a huge hit," said Larry Georgeson, operations manager for the Warren Village Learning Center. "We've had to limit the time kids spend on it and keep an eye on them as they play, because they get so excited we're afraid they might get hurt."

Using expert feedback from teachers, children and parents, we selected one top toy as well as runners-up in three categories: toys priced at \$45 or more; toys priced at less than \$45; and retro or updated versions of toys that have been around for more than 20 years.

Retro

TOP CHOICE

Doodle Doug Ohio Art, \$14.99, ages 3 and up

* Why it's great: With this battery-powered redesign of an old-fashioned Spirograph, just slip a marker - or two, or five - into Doodle Doug's adjustable arms, set him down on some paper and watch him create geometric designs.

* But: Kids have a way of walking away while toys are running, and Doodle Doug moves as it draws. If you don't want unique geometric designs on your floors and tables, you'll need to furnish some really big pieces of paper and supervise your child.

* Awards and recommendations: Dr. Toy, iParenting, Toy Wishes magazine